



FIG. A.—FEMALE.

FIG. B.—MALE.

PAPUAN MUMMIES FROM STEPHENS ISLAND.

Q. M. Specimen No. E. 12/102.

## PAPUAN MUMMIFICATION.

As practised in the Torres Strait Islands, and exemplified by specimens in the  
Queensland Museum collections.

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(Plates 2 and 3.)

THERE are in the possession of the Queensland Museum two Torres Strait mummies deputed to have been brought from Stephen Island by the late Mr. W. F. Petterd, of Launceston, Tasmania, and donated by Sir A. H. Palmer, K.C.M.G., then Acting Governor of Queensland. The only reference to these two specimens seems to be in Edge-Partington and Heape's *Ethnographical Album* <sup>(1)</sup>, in which their country of origin is said to be Murray Island. So much interest has been attached to these mummies that I have been endeavouring to ascertain something of their origin and mode of preservation. Very little seems to be known of them except by a few persons intimately connected with the islands, and even then it is difficult to get those who are in possession of the facts to take the trouble to relate them for purposes of handing down to perpetuity customs which are rapidly dying out. Sir William Flower <sup>(2)</sup>, in 1879, published an interesting account of the mode of preserving the dead in Darnley Island, and in the same volume reproduces a photograph of a specimen which was at that time in the possession of the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons, and which is again reproduced by D'Albertis <sup>(3)</sup> in his book on New Guinea.

To Mr. J. S. Bruce, who has been for many years a resident on Murray Island, I am indebted for the information from which the following notes have been compiled. Although the process is said to have been practised on all the islands of the Strait, these remarks apply particularly to the customs at one time in vogue on Murray, Stephen, and Darnley Islands.

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<sup>(1)</sup> EDGE-PARTINGTON.

*Ethnographical Album of the Pacific Islands*, third series, August, 1898, page 94.

<sup>(2)</sup> WILLIAM HENRY FLOWER.

*Illustrations of the Mode of Preserving the Dead in Darnley Island, &c.*  
*Journal of the Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland*, London, vol. 8, 1879, page 389.

<sup>(3)</sup> L. M. D'ALBERTIS.

*New Guinea* (2 vols.), London, 1880, vol. i., page 240.

**DEATH WAIL.**

Immediately after death and when the first death wail was finished, the body was laid out on a mat on the ground in front of the house where the person died. If it was a male there was no covering on the body, but females were clothed with a grass petticoat from the waist to the knees. Soon the relatives and other mourners began to assemble. If the death took place in the daytime they kept up a subdued wailing and crying until sundown, when the old men sat down in a circle round the body and began to sing the death chant, accompanying themselves by beating on their drums. When they were finished, the relatives and mourners, who sat in an outer circle, began the wailing (E bazoli). The two parties kept on alternately with chant and wail until break of day, when green cocoanuts were distributed amongst the mourners, a sign that the wailing was finished.

**TERER AND AUKEM.**

About an hour after sunrise the ceremony of carrying away the spirit of the deceased to the Island of Boigo was enacted by two men, one of whom was dressed with a petticoat made of the young fronds of the cocoanut-palm. A light mask covered his features, and he was supposed to belong to the spirit world. In one hand he carried a bow and arrows; in the other a large rattle (Goa) made of dried nut shells. He appeared in the east, and postured and danced along the beach towards the west, accompanied by the singing and drum-tapping of the old men. When he passed by where the body lay a great wail was given by the mourners, as the spirit of the deceased was supposed to be then taken away from the body. The other actor was dressed to represent an old woman who hobbled after her son. The spirit carrier always postured towards the west until he arrived at a convenient spot out of sight of the mourners; then both retired into the bush, divested themselves of their trappings, and returned to mix with the others.

**BODY PLACED ON PLATFORM.**

After Terer and Aukem had passed off with the spirit, the body was removed by the relatives to a cleared space in the bush at the rear of the residence and placed on a bamboo platform (paier) about 8 feet high. A fence of dried cocoanut leaves was erected around it to act as a screen from observation. A fire was made on the ground to one side of the platform and was kept alight night and day whilst the body remained there. This fire was not for the purpose of drying the body, but it was considered that, as people enjoyed the convenience of a fire when alive, it was proper to give them the same comfort

in death. Probably another use of the fire was to assist in killing the noxious fumes from the decomposing body. There were generally six attendants (relatives) appointed whose duties were to watch the body, keep the fires alight, and prepare the body for mummifying. If the deceased was a male, the attendants were all males; if a female, one-half were females.

#### BODY TAKEN TO THE SEA FOR PREPARATION.

A ladder was placed for the attendants to mount on to the platform to view the body where it lay four or five days to decompose. When it was considered to be ready for operating on, it was placed upon the piece of an old canoe with a hollow on the bottom and carried down to the sea. The outer skin (epidermis) was then scraped and peeled off, an incision was made with a shell in the side, and all the entrails were removed, also the testicles. The eyes were also pierced to let the liquids drip out. None of the internals were kept; they were allowed to float away with the tide. For preservation, the tongue was cut out by the root. An incision was also made round each wrist, and round each finger and nail of the hands. Then the palms of the hands with finger-nails attached were pulled off; the same was done with the soles of the feet with toe-nails attached. These were dried and worn by the widow suspended from her neck. After the body was thoroughly cleansed in the sea, it was removed to the beach and placed in a sitting posture; a cut was made at the base of the skull behind, a piece of broken arrow was inserted, and the brain removed by screwing the arrow around.

The body was then stretched out at full length on the beach and pieces of dried sago-palm (which float to these islands from New Guinea) about 1 inch in diameter were placed inside the cavity of the body in positions to support it from contracting too much in the drying process. One long piece rested on the pelvis and extended to the breast-bone as a principal support; other pieces were placed in positions where it was considered necessary. When these were all placed, the cut in the side was sewn up with fine sennet, and the body was smeared all over with red ochre mixed with cocoanut oil. Cuts were made on the kneecaps and between the fingers and toes; then holes were pierced in the cuts with an arrow so as to allow the liquids to drip from them. The body was then laid out on a wooden or bamboo frame with two bars for the feet to rest upon, and other bars were fastened across the frame where the body was fixed to them with loops of sennet at the knees, hands, and shoulders; a broad plaited band passed round the forehead. The head was supported by a pin of wood, which was placed under the chin and rested on the breast-bone.

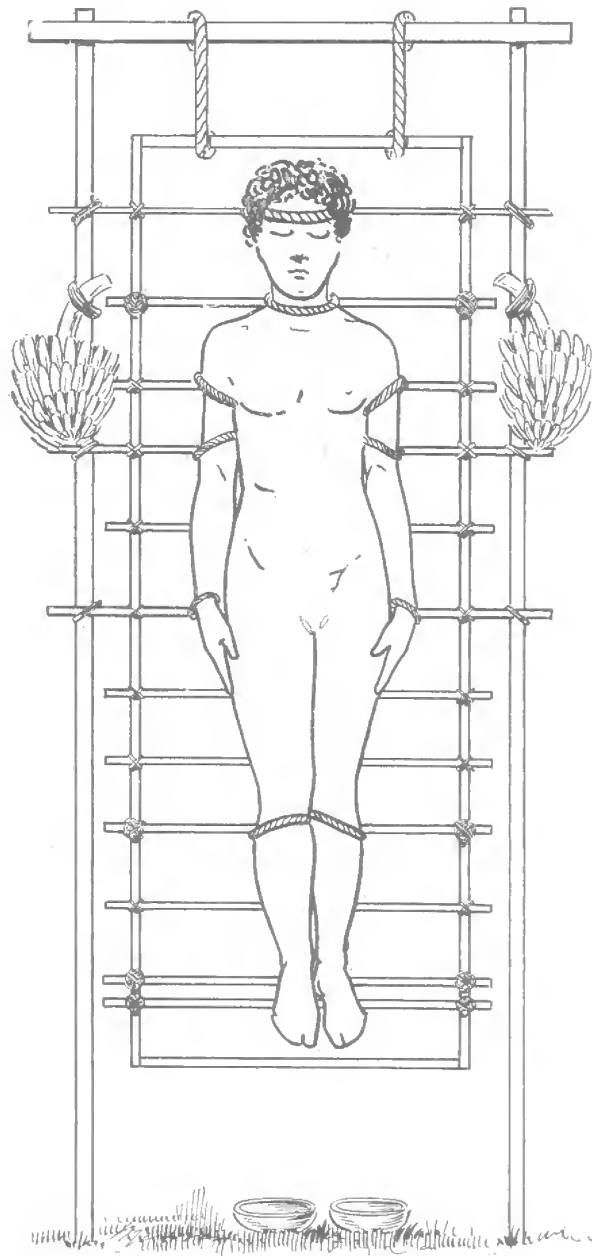
**BODY HUNG UP TO DRY.**

This frame, with the body on it, was then taken to where the platform had been removed, and hung up on a gallows, about 12 or 14 feet high, with ropes. Some of the cross-bars extended to the gallows, where they were tied to keep the body from swinging in the wind (*see sketch*). There was no screen round the gallows, it being open for anyone to view, but no one except the attendants were allowed near until the drying of the body was completed. A bunch of bananas was hung up on each side of the body, and renewed as they rotted off. A ladder was fixed up for the attendants to reach up as high as the head of the body. Twice a day they squeezed and rubbed with their hands the body downwards from the face to the feet. Two large shells were placed on the ground to receive the juices which dripped from the body. Plate 3.

**DECORATING THE MUMMY.**

When the body was nearly but not quite dried, it was taken down from the gallows to be decorated. Pieces of nautilus shell were placed in the eye-sockets to represent eyes. The body was all smeared again with ochre and cocoanut-oil. The ears where they were pierced were decorated with tufts of coloured grasses and coloured seeds. The nose-stick (*Kirkub*) was placed in position. Band of plaited sennet (*Mat lager*) were put round forehead and a white feather on each side of the head to represent a head-dress for dancing (*Dari*). A shell dance ornament (*Eb neub*) was hung in front of the penis. Pearlshell ornament, crescent-shaped (*Mai*), hung from the neck and rested on breast. The ankle and wrist ornaments (*Put*) used were made from the young fronds of the cocoanut palm.

After decorating the body, it was again hung up on the gallows to complete the drying process. When it was considered to be thoroughly dried a big feast was held, and the widow was presented with the dried tongue, palms of the hands, and soles of the feet, which she wore suspended from her neck along with her other mourning trappings. The mummified body was placed inside the bee-hive dwelling-house and fastened to the centre post. After a few years the head began to get loose and shaky; when the relatives would decide it was time to remove it from the house, the head was taken off, placed in a particular basket (*Ka*), and presented to the widow to take care of. The mummified body was then taken to one of the deceased's gardens and placed on a bamboo platform and left there to decay away.



MUMMY ON THE "GALLOWS" DURING THE PROCESS  
OF DESICCATION, ETC.



**FEMALE MUMMY'S DRESS.**

In preparing the body of a female for mummification, females dressed the lower parts of the body and prepared suitable coverings for these parts. When the body was placed on the first platform, the petticoat was removed and one made of shredded leaves of a vine called Poar was placed in front, covering from the waist to the knees. When the body was hung up on the frame to dry, an apron made of shredded banana leaves was worn in front, and a small mat made from plaited pandanus leaves worn behind. The tongue was not cut out, neither were the palms of the hands or soles of the feet stripped off. The attendants, both male and female, who prepared the bodies kept their heads wrapped up with banana leaves to protect their hair from the fumes from the time they began work until they were finished. Their food was supplied to them strung on to arrows, so that they would not require to touch the food with their hands; they gnawed it off the arrows, holding one in each hand. The bodies of very old people were not mummified; others were, if their friends felt inclined to go to the trouble, or according to the season of the year, as many feasts were held and it required a season of plenty to supply the food.

**FINAL DISPOSITION OF THE BODY.**

Some bodies were buried close to the dwelling-house, and if the head was wanted for preservation a piece of sennet was inserted in an incision made under the skin and passed through the nose. This noose was firmly tied, and the end of the line was fastened to a stake driven into the ground. When the body was considered to be ripe enough, the head was jerked off by this line, dried and decorated, and then placed inside the house. Some bodies that were not wanted for mummifying were taken to one of the deceased's gardens, placed on a bamboo platform, and left there to decay. These gardens were put out of cultivation for a few years. Others were buried inside of dwelling-houses, and in these cases the houses were generally deserted and allowed to fall into decay. The platform and gallows where bodies were placed were always placed high enough to prevent dogs from attacking the body. There was one sept of native ghouls who were allowed to eat portions of the decomposed and dried bodies, also to drink the juices which dripped into the shells placed underneath. They had, in addition, the privilege of eating bananas that were hung up on each side of the body on the gallows.

**THE QUEENSLAND MUSEUM MUMMIES.**

Measure 5 ft. 4 in. (male) and 5 ft. 5½ in. (female) respectively, and on the whole are in a good state of preservation. Except in one particular, the foregoing remarks apply so closely to these specimens that further comment on my part would be unnecessary. The bodies show clearly that no incision was made in

the sides to extract the viscera. Sir William Flower remarks that the specimen in the Museum of the Royal College of Surgeons was opened on the right flank, longitudinally at a spot between the last rib and the crest of the ileum, and was closed again by seven separate ligatures. I have examined our specimens with great care and can find no such incision nor any sign of so delicate an operation having been performed, the viscera evidently having been removed from an opening created by the removal of the anus and its attendant parts. That this should have been the case, in view of what Sir William Flower tells us, is the more astonishing since customs of this kind are as a rule so deeply rooted that natives seldom depart from them, and yet under the circumstances the method evidently adopted in the Queensland Museum specimens would seem to be the most practical from a utilitarian standpoint, especially in view of the fact that a fairly large piece of wood had been inserted into the body cavity according to custom.

There is a specimen of a similar nature in the Macleay Museum, Sydney, but although I have seen it I regret I have not had an opportunity of examining it.

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